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RubberWorld

The technical service magazine for the rubber industry

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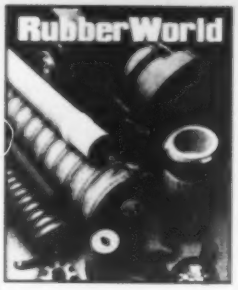

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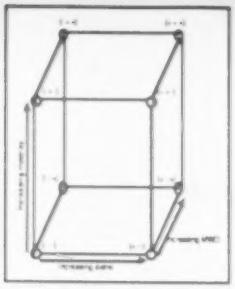

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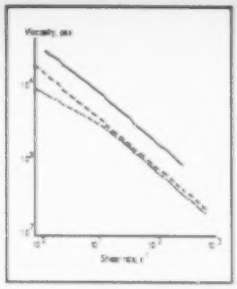

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Cover photo courtesy of Monsanto Chemical Co.

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Editorial

Reading the plethora of magazines devoted to the automotive industry is probably a frightening thing for a rubber product manufacturer. Striving to keep current, anticipate product changes and hopefully gain insight into better positioning the company in the market can turn into a real nightmare. The domestic automakers are looking to foreign outsource parts, the transplant automakers are luring parts manufacturers to the U.S. and the continued replacement of rubber parts with other polymer materials are common themes of editorial articles.

One recent issue of a leading automotive publication ran a two page advertisement that I'm sure quickened the heart rate of many rubber industry people. The left hand page blared in large type "A car without belts?" Situated on the page were three belts that could be construed as forming two eyes and a frown. The right hand page was the sales pitch that began "Open the hood of most cars nowadays and you'll find something missing. The fan belt. But what if you could also get rid of the belt that drives the water pump? The air conditioner? And the alternator?" The company that purchased the ad space (and you don't usually buy two pages of advertising without something specific to sell) went on to tell the reader that they have developed some ideas that could "help these cumbersome devices wind their way into automotive history."

The concept of "beltless cars" as the ad calls them, is not pretty for those manufacturing the belts and their suppliers. It hasn't happened yet but it's being worked on and considerable resources are being put behind this. Unlike the skirmishes fought between elastomers and other polymeric materials for specified status for automotive parts, this battle is not against a plastic trying to move into rubber applications. It's against a technology based on a different electric motor design that would eliminate the belts.

Hopefully the belt suppliers will accept this challenge and will continue product improvements geared to assuring applications in the automotive market. The Rubber Manufacturers Association figures show the automotive v-belt market is near $500 million per year. It's one of the major rubber applications on the automobile, and an application that seemed immune to the onslaught of plastic replacements. Before this ad announcing the new technology, belting seemed assured of a long association with the transportation industry. There's no indication of a major reduction in belt usage by the car manufacturers. But the fan belt is missing from my car. What's next? Hovercraft?

Don R. Smith
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RubberWorld

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- Product News
- Automotive Polymers & Design
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cent. The expansion is scheduled for completion in late 1989 and should be in operation by early 1990.

Precision Roll Grinders has broken ground for a second roll grinding and repair shop to be located in Carrollton, GA. When completed and operational in February, 1990, the 26,000-square-foot plant will provide surface finishing, computer-controlled crowns, special profiles, plating, dynamic balancing, regrooving and repair services for all types of rolls.

RMA rubber report through November (figures in metric tons)

	YTD 1988	YTD 1987	% chg.
Total new rubber			
New rubber available	3,143,816	2,978,506	5.6
Imports	1,007,713	991,210	1.7
Exports	522,832	458,161	14.1
Apparent consumption	2,606,684	2,549,672	2.2
Total natural rubber			
Imports	779,128	730,436	6.7
Exports	46,556	33,282	39.9
Apparent consumption	747,522	706,440	5.8
Total synthetic rubber			
Production	2,136,103	1,989,296	7.5
Imports	228,585	260,774	-12.3
Exports	476,276	424,879	12.1
Apparent consumption	1,859,155	1,843,226	.9
Total SBR			
Production	825,386	772,771	6.8
Imports	82,866	77,417	7.0
Exports	175,100	158,753	10.3
Apparent consumption	714,798	709,474	.8
Total nitrile			
Production	69,422	61,801	12.3
Imports	15,103	14,591	3.5
Exports	13,929	12,384	12.5
Apparent consumption	68,400	61,463	11.3
Polybutadiene			
Production	373,103	338,276	10.3
Imports	70,170	75,095	-6.6
Exports	60,672	55,628	9.1
Apparent consumption	373,785	361,026	3.5
Ethylene-propylene			
Production	243,341	231,458	5.1
Imports	12,778	6,285	103.3
Exports	45,574	43,231	5.4
Apparent consumption	210,976	190,483	10.8
Butyl, polychloroprene, polyisoprene, silicone and other synthetic elastomers			
Production	624,850	582,990	7.2
Imports	47,668	87,386	-45.4
Exports	181,001	154,883	16.95
Apparent consumption	491,195	520,785	-5.7

Monsanto's Sao Jose Dos Campos, Brazil plant for the production of Santoprene thermoplastic rubber recently went on-stream. The plant consists of a manufacturing facility, a quality control laboratory and associated material storage and packaging facilities.

DeSoto opened the recently completed addition to its Elgin, IL plant which offers toll and contract manufacture of resin intermediates and finished coatings in addition to captive manufacture of resins and specialty coatings.

Bekaert, of Zwevegem, Belgium is increasing its shareholding in **TWIL Ltd.** of the United Kingdom. The restructuring will increase Bekaert's shareholding to 60%, with **British Steel plc** holding 40%. **Bridon plc** will exchange its shares in TWIL for 100% ownership of three TWIL subsidiaries, plus cash.

PPG has begun operations at its new 51,200-square-foot reinforcements evaulation center in Shelby, NC. The center consolidates PPG's fiber glass reinforcements applications, testing, statistical and customer liaison operations. Equipment installed includes a sheet molding compound (SMC) machine, an extruder and a pultruder, with plans for installation of a pipe filament winder and cyclic burst tester.

Mainline Industrial Distributors opened a 35,000-square-foot office, warehousing and fabrication facility in the Industrial Land Bank in Milwaukee, WI. The expansion is a 40% increase of floor space for the company, and will accommodate a 40-person staff.

The **Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering** relocated into a new 5,200-square-foot facility in Covina, CA.

Contracts, licenses

Enimont Group Company, Montedipe, and the board of the **China International Trust and Investment Corporation Ltd.** have signed a joint venture to build a polystyrene plant in Hong Kong with an annual capacity of 75,000 tonnes. Investment in the project is $110 million (U.S.) and will make use of Montedipe technology.

General Tire has entered into an agreement with **Hoosier Racing Tire** of Lakeville, IN, effective immediately, to provide for the production and sale of Hoosier brand performance radial passenger and radial light truck tires. The new line of products will be produced at General's Charlotte, NC, Mt. Vernon, IL and Mayfield, KY manufacturing facilities, and is targeted to be available early in the second half of 1989.

Cabot awarded a contract to the Linde Division of **Union Carbide** for 18,000 cubic feet per hour of gaseous nitrogen to be produced by the Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) air separation process. The plant will be built for Cabot's Cab-O-Sil Division in Tuscola, IL. Anticipated start-up is the second quarter of 1989. Purity of the nitrogen gas produced will be 99.5 percent.